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# NEW A.D.

*Ross Bjork*

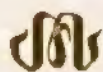


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Photo by Rob Havens '88

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# Howdy Ags!

I can't believe the 2018-2019 year is over! Inside please enjoy the walk down memory lane as we reminisce about the top 12 stories of the year. I'm sure in a few years we will all remember this as the first year of the Jimbo Fisher era. He steered us through one of the toughest schedules in the country and we finally got over the eight-win plateau and won a bowl game!

It's also sure to be a time we will talk about getting Buzz Williams. The excitement level for men's basketball is definitely on the upswing as Coach Williams and his staff are putting together their first team. Currently, there are five returning players, five new signees and three spots still to fill. The Aggies also announced they will be playing a nonconference neutral site game with tu this fall in Fort Worth.

Starting in July, Ross Bjork takes over as the director of athletics at Texas A&M. We are all excited to see Aggie Athletics compete for championships under his leadership.

The football team is grinding it out this summer, as they prepare for the upcoming football season and the schedule once again looks to be one of the toughest in the country. The players know what the expectations are and are anxious to battle after a full year's experience in the Jimbo system.

I hope you will enjoy our interview with Braden Shewmake, the talented shortstop who was selected in the first round of the Major League Baseball draft. We are sad to see him go, but we look forward to seeing him do great things in the Atlanta Braves organization.

Also inside you will get to know Katya Townsend who had a great freshman year for our women's tennis team. She will be a standout player for years to come.

We hope everyone has a great summer and be on the lookout for our next issue which will include the football preview!

Gig'em Ags!

*Rob '88*



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# Aggieland

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Aggieland Illustrated is an independently owned, Aggie owned and operated publication and in no way reflects the views or opinions of Texas A&M University.

Aggieland Illustrated (ISSN 1932-9105) is published six times a year in the United States by AggieLand Illustrated, PO Box 6841, Bryan, TX 77805-6841. Reproduction or use of editorial or graphics content in any manner without permission is prohibited. Photographs and manuscripts for publication are welcome but will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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Volume 13, Number 5

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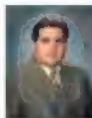
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## ...role reversal

When these two legends roamed Kyle Field, #2 Christian Rodriguez was a linebacker and #33 Christine Michael was a running back. But at halftime of the Maroon & White game, the players showed they could play both sides of the ball. Rodriguez split the defense and avoided his flag being pulled to get the ball down to the two and set up the tying touchdown. Earlier in the Legends Game C-Mike intercepted the ball and wowed the crowd with a cartwheel into a backflip in celebration. Photo by Rob Havens '88



snapshot



## ...bombs away!

A favorite Aggie Baseball tradition is throwing the rosin bag from the dugout to the mound before every home game. On senior day, as his teammates cheered him on, Allonte Wingate launched the bag through the air. The Aggies went on to win the final home game of the season over the #4 Arkansas Razorbacks. The victory gave the Aggies the series win over the Hogs, who later played in the College World Series. Photos by Rob Havens '88









## ...Gig'em America

The Aggie Baseball team lines up for their final regular season game to honor America and the flag. With their hat over their heart, and their left hand making a Gig 'em behind their back. Our players show respect for their country and their love for Texas A&M.

Photos by Rob Havens '88









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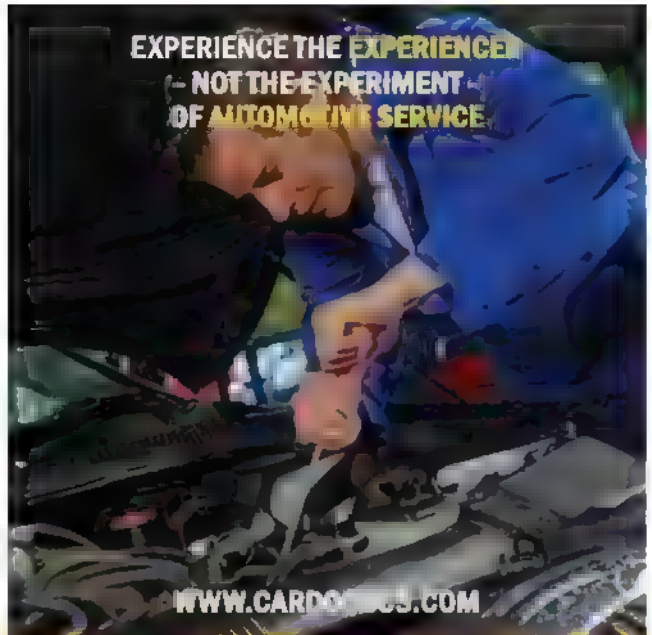


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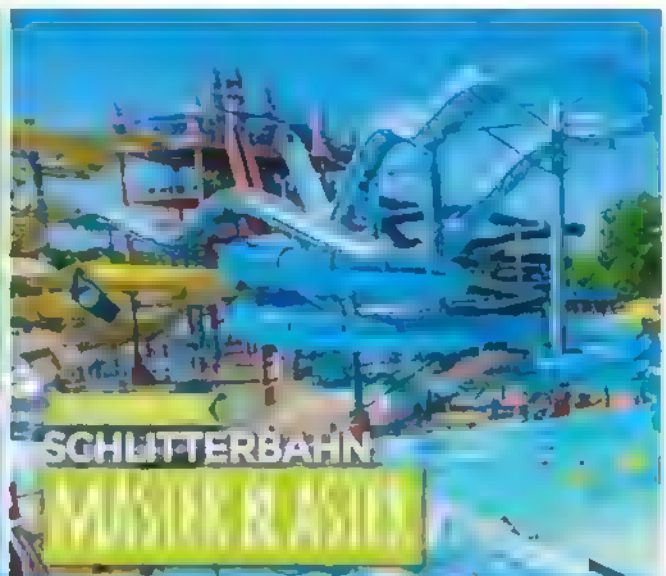
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## scoreboard

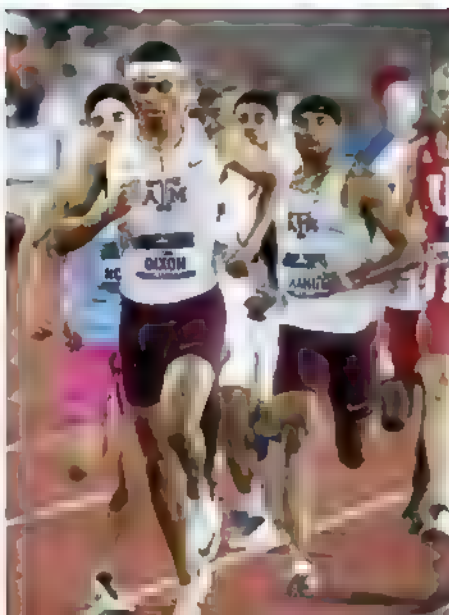
**[SOFTBALL]** Posting a 28-25 record this season with a one-and-done SEC tournament appearance, the team was at the mercy of the selection committee to continue their 17-year streak of getting into the NCAA tourney. Facing the toughest conference opponents in the country and some quality wins were just enough to continue that streak and the ladies earned the at-large bid. Unfortunately, they had a close loss to Houston and an extra-inning loss to the host school in Austin that ended their season. On the bright side, after the season ended, Coach Evans added Craig Snider to her coaching staff. He is a 19-year coaching veteran and 2018 NCAA National Champion. He comes to Aggieland from Florida State and will serve as the Aggies' hitting coach. He has an amazing resume and should be an excellent hire for the Aggies.



**[MEN'S TENNIS]** The men had an early exit in the SEC tournament as they faltered on a windy day to #22 South Carolina. They earned a host seed in the NCAA tourney and made quick work of A&M-Corpus Christi in the first round. The Aggies had a hard-fought second round match versus Oklahoma and were just points away from winning, before losing the last few points of a final set tie-breaker that cost them a 4-3 match decision.

**[WOMAN'S GOLF]** The Ags came up just short in the SEC tournament and did not make it into match play. They did earn their 19th straight NCAA bid and earned a trip to the Norman, Oklahoma Regional. The team wrapped up their season with a 13th place finish, shooting 36-over. First-year Aggie coach Andrea Gaston says she is encouraged by what she saw this year and is ready to get back to work and get ready for next season.

**[TRACK & FIELD]** The Aggie women got second place at the SEC Championships, while the men finished in fourth. The teams advanced to Austin for the NCAA Championships where the men placed sixth and the women finished in fourth. The team swept the 4X400 relays as the women broke a school record with a world-leading time of 3:25.57. The men ran the second fastest time in collegiate history with a time of 2:59.05. Jazmine Fray won the NCAA 800m title.



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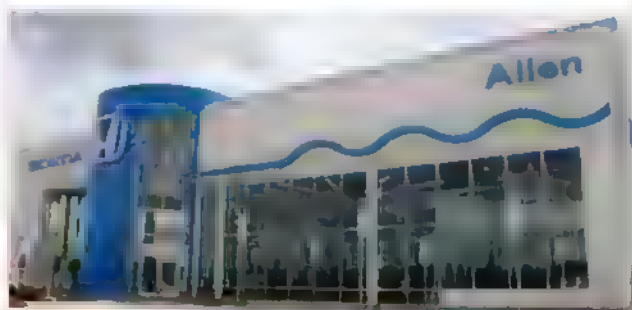
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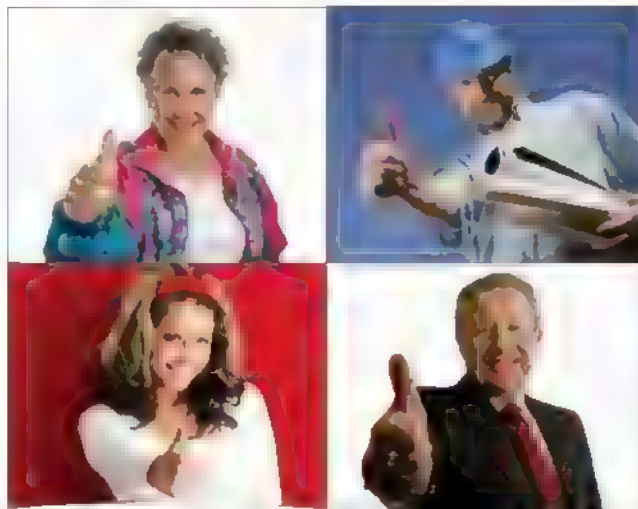
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## scoreboard

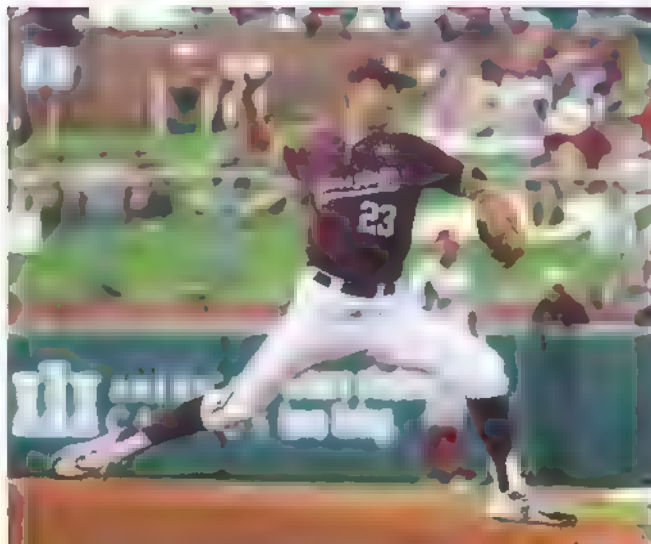
**[WOMEN'S TENNIS]** The Aggies hosted the SEC tournament and took advantage of the home courts by beating Mississippi State and Tennessee to advance to the semi-finals against #1 Georgia. Although the Aggies fell 4-0 to the Bulldogs, they earned an at-large bid to the NCAA tournament and a short trip to Austin. The Aggies had a tough match against Rice but battled through it to survive and advance to play #9 seed Texas in the second round. The ladies dominated the Horns 4-1 to advance to the Sweet 16. The team traveled to Nashville to take on the Commodores, who they had beaten earlier in the season, but the young team fell 4-0 to end the year. Coach Weaver was proud of his team and believes the experience they gained will really benefit them as they compete next year.



**[MEN'S GOLF]** The team advanced to match play in the SEC Championships where they defeated Georgia and then advanced to play Arkansas in the Semifinals. In a match that took extra holes to determine the winner, the Ags lost 3-2. The Aggies played well and won their Regional and advanced to Match play for the second consecutive year. The Aggies were matched up against #2 Vandy. Sam Bennett and Chandler Phillips won their matches and the quarterfinal came down to the final pairing. Walking up the final extra hole it looked like the Aggies would advance to the Final Four as the last Vandy golfer hit his drive behind a tree. Dan Erickson was sitting pretty in the fairway. But the third shot of his opponent, Will Gordon, landed just 12 feet from the pin and he sank the putt for a par. Erickson lipped out his short par putt and the Commodores took the match ending the team's season.



**[BASEBALL]** The Aggies finished strong in the regular season taking two out of three from power-house Arkansas in what most experts thought would be the regional host clinching series. The Ags took care of Florida in the first game of the SEC tournament, but the bats went cold and although the Aggies had unbelievable performances by Chris Weber and John Doxakis on the bump, they lost two close games to Georgia and Ole Miss. As a result, the Aggies got shipped off to Morgantown, West Virginia. They lost their first game to Duke 8-5 setting up an elimination game with the host school. Against West Virginia, the Aggies fell behind 9-1. They battled back, starting in the seventh with the help of a Logan Foster grand slam. Trailing 10-7 in the ninth, the Aggies loaded the bases and with two outs and a full count, Bryce Blaum hit a grand slam walk-off shot over the 375 sign that cleared the bases and gave the Aggies a historic win. Unfortunately, in the rematch game against Duke, the Aggies fell 4-1 ending their season.



# Ross Bjork

HIRED AS NEW A.D. - BY: ROB HAVENS '88





The Greek philosopher Heraclitus once said, "The only thing that is constant is change." When the powers that be at LSU decided a change was in order for the head of their athletic department, they sought after a former student and employee that had gone on to great success after leaving the bayou. Scott Woodward became their main target after showing a propensity to make big splash hires that rocked the nation in Jumbo Fisher and Buzz Williams.

It seems they were able to secure that hire before they even announced the firing of Joe Alleva. Woodward made the announcement he was leaving and the search was on for a new athletic director for Texas A&M. President Young was quick to act and made the decision to place R.C. Slocum as the interim athletic director, a move that was applauded by Aggies across the board. Coach Slocum loves Texas A&M and accepted the responsibility of manning the ship as Young searched for a permanent replacement.

After a nationwide search, Ross Bjork was selected and accepted the job to be the next director of athletics at A&M. At a welcome ceremony held in the Hall of Champions, President Young introduced him to a room full of coaches, student athletes, staff and alumni.

Bjork's desire to become an athletic director started when he was a sophomore football player at Emporia State. He met with his director at the

time and asked: "What do you do?" Bill Quayle explained what he did for a living and Ross decided he wanted his job one day.

In 2010 Bjork became the youngest athletic director in the FBS when he was hired by Western Kentucky (WKU). He understands what it means to be knocked down and keep fighting as he interviewed six times at different schools before landing the job at WKU. He believes it was by the grace of God that he didn't get one of those jobs and trusts that he wouldn't be where he is today if he had.

Ross left WKU in 2012 to take over as the athletic director at Ole Miss where he led until accepting the post at A&M. During his tenure with the Rebels, the football team played in New Year's Six bowls twice. The basketball teams played in three NCAA tournaments and the baseball team made it to Omaha for the College World Series.

His fundraising skills in Oxford were exemplary and he oversaw big time facilities improvements including a \$94.5 million basketball arena and \$65 million in renovations to their football stadium.

Not only has Bjork shown that he can fundraise and head up a successful athletic program, but he was able to do that in the SEC. He wasn't looking for a change but when A&M approached him, it was an opportunity that he couldn't turn down. Bjork believes Texas A&M is one of the top five programs in the country and looks forward to

continuing the success the school has already had, and striving to bring more championships to Aggieland.

One of the keys to finding a replacement for Woodward was someone that would work well with Jimbo Fisher. Texas A&M has made a big commitment to the leader of our football program who is in his second of a ten-year deal. "We're both cut of the same cloth... small-college football players who know how to work hard, who know how to have a positive attitude, who know how to grind in this business of college athletics." Bjork said. "So to me, it's a partnership. We're going to lock arms. We're going to have the same kind of vision — that we can win, and we know we will win championships, and I say plural."

Bjork believes the student-athletes and the coaches should be the faces of the program and his job is to steward and lead them through all of that. Early on he will learn and listen and build relationships with coaches, players, and staff. He wants to set a vision of success in excellence across the board. Including success on the field, in the classroom and fundraising to give everyone the opportunity to be the best.

He sees a bright future for Texas A&M. "All of the resources are in place and being the only SEC school in the state of Texas, there is a ton of power in that." Bjork said. "...And that's only in five or seven years of being in the SEC. That's only going to get better."





# MAROON & W

BY ROB HAVENS '88

Texas A&M wrapped up their spring camp with the annual Maroon & White spring game. This was Jimbo Fisher's second spring game and just like last year, it was a work-day for the team. Although Coach Fisher is called the commissioner of the contest, he is working to make the players better and coaching them up throughout the game.

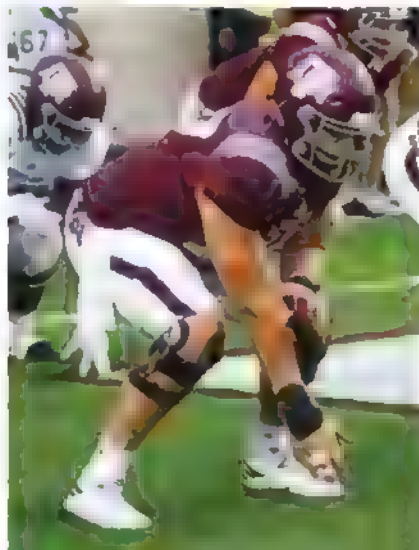
In last year's game, Kellen Mond led his team to victory and gave fans a glimpse into why he would become the starting QB for Jimbo. After a successful season and the departure of Nick Starkel, Mond is the clear-cut starter and ready for a breakout year.

Mond had a solid spring game going 14 of 26 for 172 yards and two touchdowns. Without his full array of receivers and running backs Kellen was

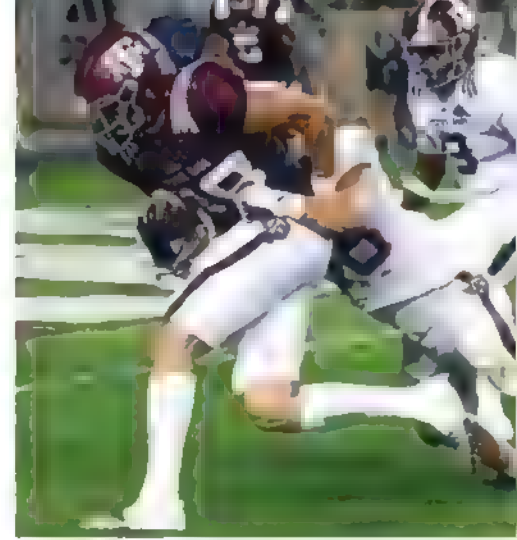
still able to move the ball up and down the field for the White squad.

Deneric Prince took advantage of some playing time and gained 52 yards on 12 carries for the White team. Jacob Kibodi was the leading rusher on the day for the Maroon team gaining 106 yards on 20 carries and a touchdown.

The tight end position was huge for A&M last year, but with the early departure of Jace Sternberger the Aggies had a huge hole to fill. All the early hype was on true freshman Baylor Cupp, who had a solid day with five catches for 88 yards and a score to lead the Maroon team. But Glenn Beal matched the true freshman and showed why he will be competing for the starting gig as he also had five catches for 70 yards and a touchdown for White.







# WHITE GAME

Jhamon Ausbon had five receptions for 38 yards and Camron Buckley had three catches for 54 yards and a touchdown for the White team

Aggie fans got their first look at heralded newcomer Zach Calzada behind center. The true freshman enrollee was 8-21 for 139 yards and a touchdown for the Maroon team. James Foster backed up Mond and threw for 67 yards on 7-12 passing with one pick.

The strength of this year's team looks once again to be the defensive line, which is big, strong and has the best depth Jayden Peevy had a pair of sacks in the scrimmage. Aaron Hansford switched to the defensive side of the ball and as a linebacker led the Maroon in tackles

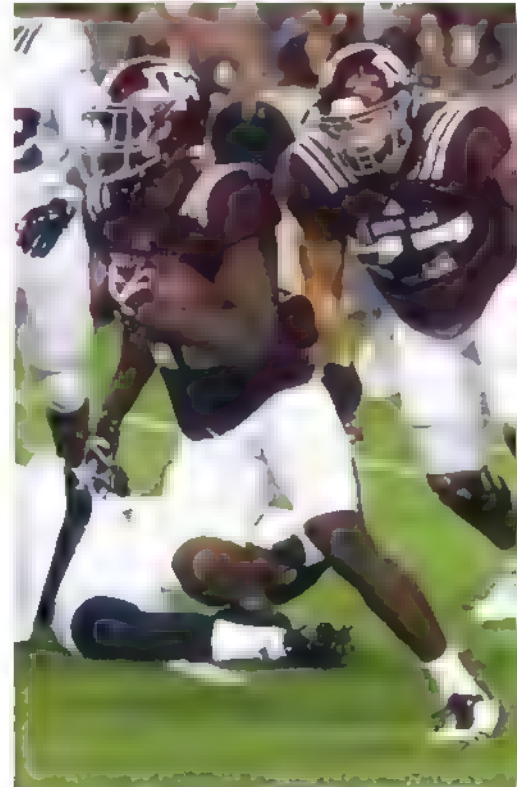
Moses Reynolds the little brother of former Aggie great Josh Reynolds, had

two interceptions as a defensive back

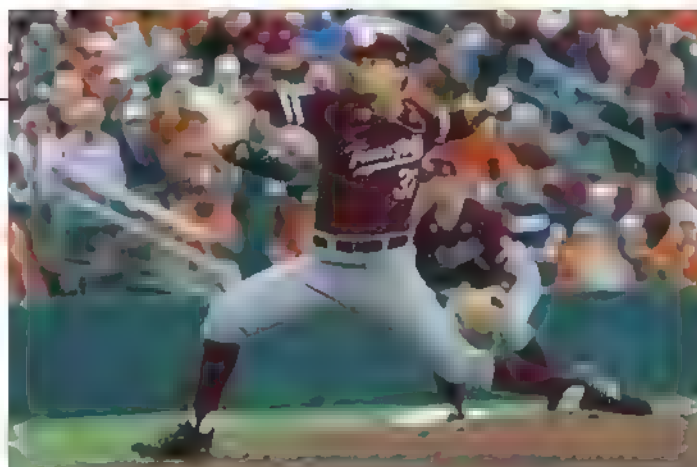
On special teams, Braden Mann launched missiles all game long and true freshman Caden Davis came in and knocked through a 45-yard field goal for the White squad

Coach Fisher said he was pleased with how the scrimmage went and looks forward to getting all the new freshman in this summer and get them going He liked the physicality of the game and thought both the offensive line and defensive line did some good things He thought Mond had a really solid game and made good decisions.

Jimbo is excited about next season and is ready for the challenge.



# TOP 12 ST



## 12

Aggie Baseball beats tw in Austin and TCU at Minute Maid Park. The Ags jumped on the Longhorns early, getting out to a 7-1 lead. The Horns battied back and trailed Texas A&M 7-6 in the ninth but Logan Foster came up with the big hit, plating two runs and giving the Aggies a 9-6 lead. Kalich came in the bottom of the ninth and closed the game out for the win. Aggie baseball fans know what a thorn in the side the TCU Horn Frogs have been to our program. The Ags finally got the monkey off their back with a tough 1-0 win over the Frogs in the Shriners Hospital for Children College Classic.

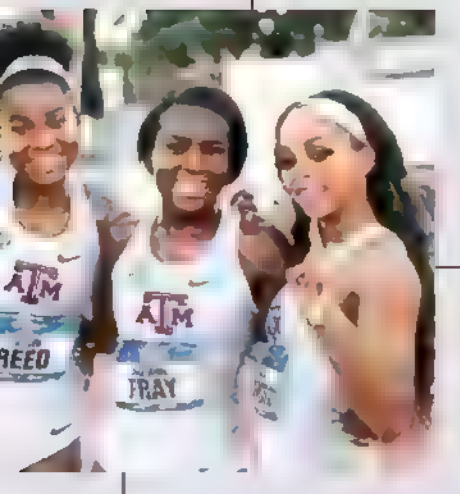
## 11

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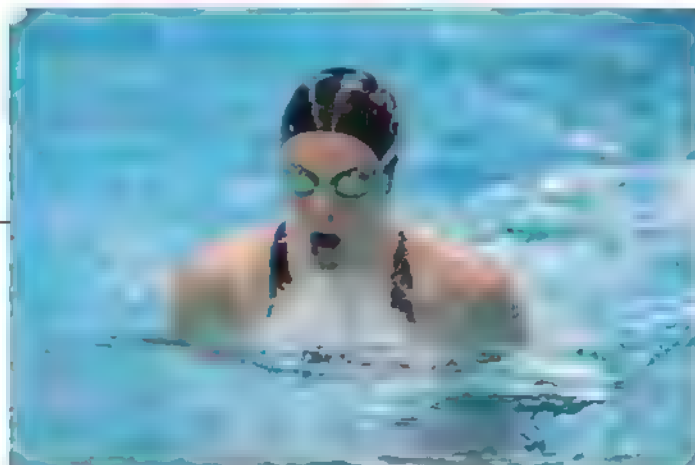


# STORIES

## OF THE YEAR



keeps 4X400 relays in record times at the championships. Bryce Deadmon, Robert Grant, and Devin Dixon ran the second fastest time in history 2:59.05. In the women's race, Tierra Reed, Jaevin Reed, Jazmine Fray and Syaira Richards set the school record and posted a world-leading time of 3:47.77.

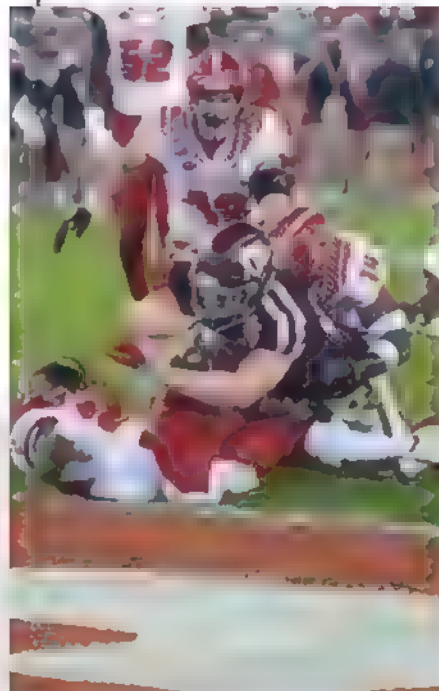


# 10

One of the goals of every program at A&M is to win an SEC Championship. The women's swimming and diving team has accomplished that goal not once or twice, but the last four years in a row. Battling through adversity and defying expectations from doubters that believed they couldn't do it again this season, the ladies went out and took it.

# 9

Cullen Gillaspia came to A&M as a walk-on and appeared in three games as a freshman. He earned a scholarship his sophomore year and was named the 12th Man after fall camp. Known for his great intensity and toughness, he blossomed as a special teams player. After Jimbo arrived, he moved to fullback and continued to develop his game. In his final collegiate play, Gillaspia took a handoff and fought through tackles and dove into the end zone scoring the first ever touchdown by a 12th Man. He also made history when he became the first 12th Man to be drafted when he was selected by his hometown, the Houston Texans, in the seventh round of the NFL Draft



# 8

Trayveon Williams became the single season all-purpose yardage record holder as well as the single-season rushing leader of all times after a stellar 2018 season. While NFL prospects around the country decided to sit out their bowl games to protect themselves from injury, Williams went out and broke the Gator Bowl record for rushing in a single game with 241 yards. He was instrumental in several games including a winning touchdown run over Kentucky in overtime. He was drafted in the sixth round by the Cincinnati Bengals.



# 7

It was the first big game of the Jimbo Fisher era. The Aggies took on the eventual national champion Clemson Tigers and gave them all they could handle for four quarters. A national audience got to see what a difference Coach Fisher had made to our program in just nine short months. Kelien Mond showed why he earned the starting nod over Nick Starkel as the talented sophomore passed for 430 yards and came up just short of leading the Aggies to a come from behind upset of the No. 2 team



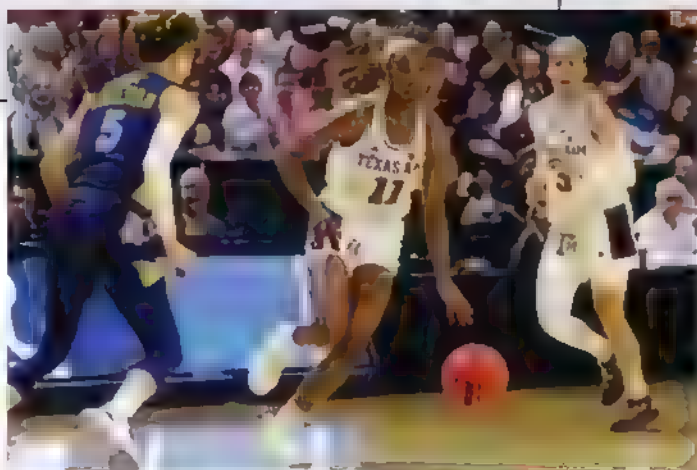


6

Aggie baseball found themselves down 9-1 in the bottom of the seventh inning against the one-seed, West Virginia, in the Morgantown Regional of the NCAA tournament. The Ags battled back with the help of a grand slam by Logan Foster but still found themselves down by three with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning. With the bases loaded and a full count, Bryce Blaum hit a walk-off grand slam to propel the Aggies to victory. It was one of the biggest comebacks and most exciting endings in program history.

5

In what was supposed to be a rebuilding year for Aggie women's basketball, it turned out to be a Sweet 16 ride for the hard-working team. Coach Blair said their goal was to make it to the tournament after replacing four starters from last year's squad. But the team over-achieved, and were only a couple of possessions from upsetting the defending national champs to advance to the Elite 8. Led by one of the nation's best players, Chennedy Carter, the scrappy team battled all season long and lived up to the legacy that is Texas A&M women's basketball.

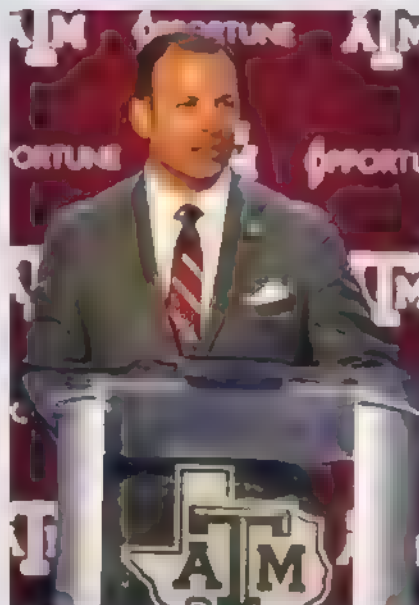




Jimbo Fisher signed the highest-ranked class in program history as he and his staff assembled the number three group in the nation. Two five-star players, offensive lineman Kenyon Green and defensive lineman Demarvin Leal, headlined the talented group of athletes. Coach Fisher was pleased that they were able to fill some holes in some much-needed areas and bring in some of the best players from around the nation



President Michael K. Young introduced Ross Bjork as Texas A&M's new Director of Athletics at a welcoming ceremony in the Hall of Champions. Following the departure of Scott Woodward, R. C. Slocum stepped in on an interim basis to lead Aggie Athletics. After a nationwide search, Young found his man at a fellow SEC institution, Ole Miss. Bjork spent the last seven years leading Rebels Athletics and believes Texas A&M is one of the Top 5 jobs in the nation



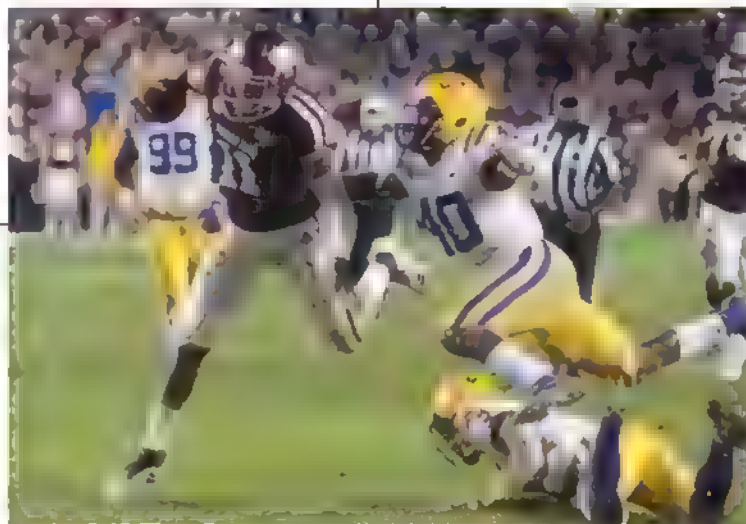
Aggie basketball got a huge shot in the arm when former assistant, Buzz Williams, decided to come back home to Aggieland to become the new head coach. He gained valuable experience as the head man at New Orleans, Marquette, and Virginia Tech before returning to his home state. He was able to turn around a Virginia Tech program at a football school in the toughest basketball conference in the nation, and lead them to three consecutive NCAA tournaments including a Sweet 16 trip last season. I'd say the future looks bright for Aggie Basketball!







For the first time since joining the SEC, the Aggies defeated LSU in one of the greatest games ever to be played at Kyle Field. Facing defeat with only one second on the clock, the Aggies scored a miraculous touchdown to extend the game into extra periods. The Ags and Tigers battled back and forth for seven overtimes until Kellen Mond completed a pass to Kendrick Rogers for the game-winning two-point conversion. The 12th Man emptied out of the stands and rushed the field to celebrate the historic win.



# SHEWMAKE SHEWMAKE SHEWMAKE SHEWMAKE



## Q&A

### WHEN DID YOU START PLAYING BASEBALL?

I started playing baseball when I was about three and a half or four years old. I wasn't actually old enough to play yet, but my dad put me into t-ball early. I actually got onto a team with two guys that wound up being two of my best friends for seven, eight, nine years after that. So, I got really lucky. I played up for a couple of years because I wasn't technically old enough just because of where my birthday fell, so I played up and found a couple of my best friends that I knew I would have for the rest of my life. That's kind of where the love of baseball started off for me.

### DID YOU PLAY OTHER SPORTS AS YOU WERE GROWING UP AS WELL?

Yeah, I played basketball from first



grade all through my junior year in high school. I played soccer up until seventh grade. After that, I picked up football and played all the way through high school. So, I played a little bit of everything.

#### **SO, WHEN DID YOU KNOW BASEBALL WAS GOING TO BE THE THING YOU PLAYED IN COLLEGE?**

Probably my sophomore year in high school, I always loved baseball. At one point I wanted to be a basketball player and then I realized that wasn't going to be for me. Then for a second there, because football was so new and I wanted to be a quarterback. But as I kept playing and kept getting hit I realized I could do this in high school but once these guys get bigger I'm in trouble. So, baseball was it and I loved putting work in with my dad, his assistant coaches, my coach in high school and all those guys. I loved being out on the baseball field so I knew this was the place for me.

#### **DID YOUR DAD COACH YOU IN HIGH SCHOOL?**

No, my dad is actually the head baseball coach at UT Dallas. So, I would go up and practice with his team all through high school, work out with him all summer. We'd go lift, we'd go hit and take ground balls and do all that fun stuff. We made it into a two and a half to three-hour ordeal every day.

#### **SO, TELL ME ABOUT YOUR RECRUITMENT TO A&M.**

I was a sophomore in high school and playing summer ball and I hadn't really talked to a lot of people, hadn't gotten any offers. I had talked to UTSA just a little bit and talked to A&M-Corpus just a little bit, but nothing more than that. Actually, at the end of that summer, I played through that summer and my summer coach came up to me one game and said: "Hey man I talked a little bit to A&M, they kinda like you, they're not sure about it, I think you should really go to their camp." So, we got into their camp and I came out here for three-day little camp and did the pro day kind of work out, scrimmaged a couple of times. Had a good couple of days and got back home and on September 1st and Coach Bolt called me on the first night saying, "Hey man, we want you

to come down here for a football game and a tour." That next Saturday I came down and toured everything did all that fun stuff. That's when we went up to coach's office and I got offered

#### **DID YOU ACCEPT RIGHT AWAY?**

I didn't actually. I told my dad and he was like alright we will think about it because as of then that was the only offer we had. They were like take your time, just know that as long as you are still looking we are still looking. So, we were driving down University and I told my dad, this place is really cool I think I'd like to go here. And he told me, "well dude, I think you've made your decision." About two weeks later, I called coach right after one of my football fall practices or summer practices like two-a-days, and said, "Hey I wanna be an Aggie." It was a cool feeling. I had a couple of my buddies that I played football there and they were going nuts in the background, so it was a lot of fun.

#### **TELL ME ABOUT YOUR TIME SO FAR HERE AT A&M.**

It's been really special, it's really awesome to be able to call this place home. Just looking around, seeing the beautiful football stadium in the background, the track, the indoor football facility, this place is so special. The traditions are amazing at every single game. The traditions at football games are amazing. It's just definitely a place that I would recommend people go.

#### **WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MOMENT SO FAR DURING YOUR TIME AT A&M?**

My favorite moment so far is definitely my freshman year when we went to Omaha, that was so fun. Really special to be able to share with that team, that's something we are going to have with that team forever. I still talk to Blake Kopetsky on a daily basis, I love that kid. He's a great guy, I can call him up if I need anything, anything at all.

#### **HAVE YOU TRIED TO USE THE EXPERIENCE YOU GAINED THEN, TO TRY TO GET YOU BACK?**

Yeah, I think last year we kind of looked forward, wanting to go to Omaha too much. We kinda put it up on this

pedestal. This is where we have to get so we have to do everything to gear towards here and we didn't focus on what was in front of us. So, we've tried to turn back the clock a little bit and made ourselves focus more on the game right in front of us. If we take care of the one in front of us it will get us to the end goal.

#### **HOW WOULD YOU COMPARE LAST YEAR'S SQUAD TO THIS YEAR'S SQUAD?**

This year's team is has a lot more cohesion. I mean yeah we lost guys like Michael Helman, who was an absolute monster. But we got some freshman that have come in that do a great job. And we got Bryce Blaum that's a transfer that gets to play his first year this year. Everybody cares a lot, and cares about the team not necessarily themselves.

#### **AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR, YOU WEREN'T HITTING AS WELL AS YOU CAN AND I'M SURE HOPED THAT YOU WOULD. WHAT HAPPENED TO TURN IT AROUND FOR YOU?**

When I was hitting about a buck eighty for the first three weeks, I was in the cages with Coach Bolt for at least an hour and a half or two hours every day, and he really did a great job of getting me right. It was little things, the swing felt ok but it was trying to do too much. Trying to hit the ball out of the yard instead of trying to get your singles when they throw you a good pitch. Even trying to hit doubles. Your doubles are just as good as home runs when you have someone in scoring position. I mean yeah, you want to hit the long ball, but I think you hit the long ball by keeping a good approach and hitting singles when you can take them.

#### **WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE A&M TRADITION?**

I love the "Ball Five" tradition for baseball. But overall, the tradition I like most is the War Hymn. It's fun to do and really cool to look across the stadium and see the whole place rockin'!



KATYA

TOWNSEND

## WHERE DID YOU GROW UP AND WHEN DID YOU START PLAYING TENNIS?

I moved around a lot growing up. I was born in Michigan and then for my dad's work I lived in Brazil for a year, China for two years, went back to Michigan and then we decided to move to Florida for tennis. I started tennis when I was really young – three-years-old. I have a twin sister and we always played together and my parents play for fun. So that's how we got into it, but around age six, that was my first tournament, I actually played my sister in the finals.

Everyone thought she was going to win because I was young, I didn't naturally have as good of technique as she did, but I ended up winning. I don't know how. It's always been really competitive between us and I think that helped me improve a lot growing up. Ever since I was young, six or seven, I remember telling my parents that I wanted to play pro tennis. I just thought it was the coolest thing. Since my first tournament, I started practicing almost every day, even from that age. I just always loved it. I never got burned out or tired of it. It's just what I want to do with my life.

## SO, DOES YOUR SISTER STILL PLAY?

Yeah, she plays for A&M-Corpus Christi I'm actually going to go to Mexico this summer for pro tournaments and she might come with me too. We use to travel a lot before college so it will be cool to travel with her again

## TELL ME ABOUT YOUR RECRUITMENT TO COME TO A&M.

Originally, when I was like 15 or 16 (or maybe younger I'm not sure) I never really wanted to go to college, I always wanted to play pro right away. As I got older I started realizing what a great opportunity it is. Players are developing later and later. College is such a unique experience that you don't get to experience if you play pro. Playing with a team, being able to study as well. So, I started looking into it. I wanted to stay in the south. I'm not sure why but it's a good location for pro tournaments and I knew I would be trying to play both college and pro matches. A lot of my top choices were Florida, Miami, South Carolina. But when I came to visit here, talking to Mark (Coach Weaver) and the coaches, and how focused they were on helping me as a player develop I knew



this was the right place.

## **AND SO YOU'VE HAD AN AMAZING FIRST YEAR.**

Yes, it has been amazing, such a good experience. I didn't really know what to expect coming in. I was injured for almost eight months coming to college. I hadn't played a tournament since December of 2017 and it was a tough few months being injured. I saw four different doctors and didn't know how it was going to turn out. I worked really hard to come back. Serving again, hitting forehands and backhand, every stroke. I came early last summer to try and get a head start on physical therapy and practice and everything. My results this year and what I've done so far, and I hope to still do better. Have just shown all the hard work. If you get pushed down by an injury, you have to just keep coming back because anything can happen. I just hope I can keep it up. I want to keep striving for more and keep getting better.

## **WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FAVORITE MOMENT THIS YEAR?**

There are a lot of good moments. Two of my favorite matches, I would say, first of all, would be Vanderbilt. I actually get more nervous watching my teammates than playing. I had a really good day, doubles and singles. Then watching Renee clinch and then running up, like with the whole team that was so amazing to beat that team. I have a lot of friends on that team, and I respect all the players. So that was a great experience. Also, Tennessee was one of the first matches I could clinch and it was a great feeling too.

## **YOUR WIN AGAINST VANDY WAS THE HIGHEST RANKED WIN BY A FRESHMAN IN PROGRAM HISTORY?**

Yeah, I didn't really know it would be that going into the match. I try not to think about their ranking or how old she is or anything. When you are on the court it's just you versus the other player. It shouldn't matter with tennis especially, so I just try to play smart, just play in the moment, without over thinking it. Oh, I could win this match. I just try to play the way I know I can.

## **COLLEGE MATCHES ARE UNIQUE BECAUSE OF THE FACT YOU ARE PLAYING A SINGLES MATCH BUT**

## **AT THE SAME TIME, THERE ARE FIVE OTHER MATCHES GOING ON WITH YOUR TEAMMATES. HOW DO YOU PROCESS THAT? DO YOU TRY TO JUST FOCUS ON YOUR OWN COURT AND TRY TO ENCOURAGE YOUR TEAMMATES?**

I love playing next to my teammates. There are obviously pros and cons to it. I love the energy it gives and being able to play for a team. There is a different kind of pressure and there have been matches where I'm like, "I'm not going to lose this match for my team." I think that also helps me develop a lot, just for the future, how to play with that type of pressure. Sometimes I have gotten distracted, I sometimes have a habit of looking at the scores. I care so much about how the other girls do too. I'm really close with all of them. Sometimes it's hard not to get caught up. Who's winning? Who's losing? How the match might end up and it's something I've been working on to get better at, to focus on my court. It's just a process. But it's a great atmosphere when you play next to your teammates.

## **IS THAT WHAT COACH WEAVER TELLS YOU GUYS TO DO, JUST FOCUS ON YOUR COURT?**

Focus on your court, stay in the moment. With the rules sometimes, like there have been so many matches this season, where I have been in the third set and the other matches finish and I'll have to stop, that's new for me because in individual tournaments you never stop a match, you always finish unless you're injured. So that has been something new because sometimes I'll see that other matches are about to finish and I'll be thinking about whether I'm going to get to finish or not. Sometimes I'll start rushing, but the truth is you have to stay in the moment and not think about that. I think actually the Tennessee match where I was able to do that better. Yeah, it's just a work in progress.

## **SO, YOU KNOW WHEN YOU ARE PLAYING WHO WON THE DOUBLES POINT, DO YOU KEEP TRACK OF THE OTHER COURTS SO YOU KNOW HOW MANY MATCHES YOU NEED TO WIN TO EARN THE VICTORY?**

(laughs) I probably shouldn't, but I always know. Like when Jayci is up or if she won the first set. A lot of times I'll

see Tatiana and Renee. Actually, most of the time if I see that especially Tatiana or Renee if they lost the first set, they have won so many three-set matches this season I will be like, "Oh they are going to win the second it's fine." or I'll make predictions on it. But it's hard to tell some times. It's hard for me not to be interested in them as well.

## **WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE TEAM MOMENT THIS SEASON?**

Probably, I think it was the Vanderbilt match after we finished the match and we took pictures and everything we were in the locker room. We have some crazy people on our team (laughs). They like to dance and everything. We put music on the speaker and we were just dancing and jumping up and down. That was such a great moment. We were just all so happy. And all of the adrenaline, we just let it all out.

## **TELL ME ABOUT YOUR TIME HERE AT A&M. IS IT DIFFICULT BEING A STUDENT-ATHLETE?**

Sometimes you don't have much time. Like some days we will leave at 7 a.m. and come back at 9 p.m.. We have study hall pretty late at night. It's definitely been a lot busier than before college, but I like every part of it. It makes you feel accomplished, that you can keep up with school and still practice every day and it's just a lot of fun overall with the team.

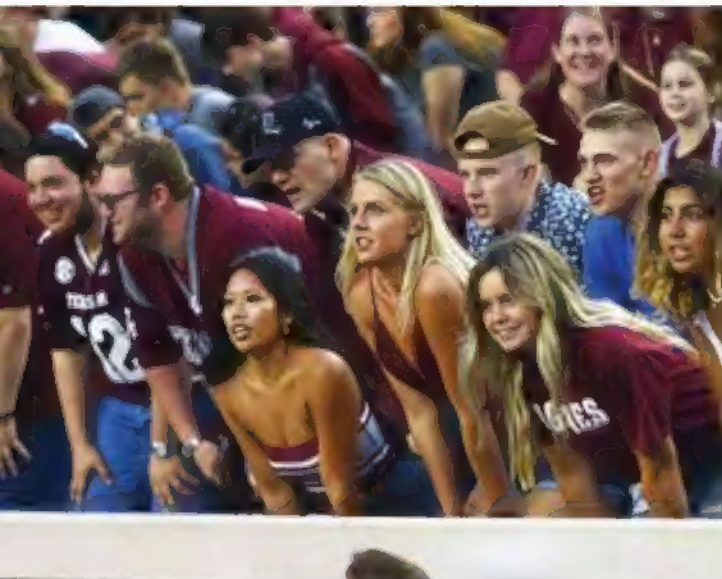
## **HAVE YOU HAD THE CHANCE TO ATTEND OTHER SPORTS ON CAMPUS?**

I have friends in a lot of other sports. I've been to a few track meets and some football games. I had never been to a football game before this last fall.

## **WHAT DID YOU THINK?**

It's so much fun. I don't really know what's going on, on the field. (laughs) A lot of people probably wouldn't think that's very good since we are such a big football school but I've never really known about football growing up but hopefully I'll learn and it's a lot of fun to watch and just to be able to watch other student-athletes doing the same thing every day.







flashback



here...

On July 25, 2019, former Aggie basketball coach Tony Barone Sr. passed away at the age of 72. Larger than life, Barone was a native of Chicago who graduated from Duke University as an Academic All-American where he played guard and wore #12. He coached at Texas A&M from 1991-1998 and compiled a record of 76-120. Barone went on to be the assistant coach of the Memphis Grizzlies and then served as their interim head coach. Barone is a member of the Chicagoland Sports Hall of Fame. (Photos courtesy of Aggie Athletics)

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